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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger study examining students' attitudes toward schoolwork, this study examined the relationship between Caucasian- and Chinese-American children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their gender, socioeconomic status, age, school achievement, and school attainment value (the importance they placed on doing well in school). The study also examined the relationship between students' attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. Subjects were 140 Caucasian-American and 97 Chinese-American fourth- through eighth-grade students from 2 Roman Catholic schools. The students completed a questionnaire that measured their attitudes toward schoolwork and perception of parental behaviors supporting schoolwork. Analysis showed that for Caucasian-Americans, school attainment value predicted students' perception of parental behaviors supporting schoolwork and students' attitudes toward schoolwork. For Chinese-Americans, both school attainment value and school achievement predicted attitudes toward schoolwork but not perception of parental behaviors supporting schoolwork. For both groups, students' attitudes toward schoolwork were predicted by their perception of parental behaviors supporting schoolwork. Findings suggest that cultural background mediates the prediction of student attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors supporting schoolwork. (MM)

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Caucasian- and Chinese-American Children's Attitudes Toward Schoolwork and Perception of Parental Behaviors That Support Schoolwork

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Abstract

The relationship between Caucasian- and Chinese-American children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their gender, SES, age, school achievement and school attainment value and the relationship between their attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork were examined. Questionnaire data from 237 4th- through 8th-grade students were analyzed by Factor analysis and stepwise multiple regression analysis. Results showed that for Caucasian-Americans, school attainment value predicted children's perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork and children's attitudes toward schoolwork. For Chinese-Americans, both school attainment value and school achievement predicted their attitudes toward schoolwork but not their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. For both groups, children's attitudes toward schoolwork were predicted by their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Caucasian- and Chinese-American Children's Attitudes Toward Schoolwork and Perception of Parental Behaviors That Support Schoolwork

The importance of homework to school learning and achievement is widely acknowledged. It supplements classroom instruction and contributes to better student achievement (see, e.g., Walberg, Pascal, & Weinstein, 1985). In a study of the mathematics achievement scores of 28,274 elementary school students from 12 countries, for example, Walberg, Harnisch and Tsai (1986) found that hours of homework per week was one of the most consistent predictors of math achievement. Since homework plays an important role in the academic achievement of students, attitudes toward homework deserve attention. This is so because one may expect that students' attitudes toward homework would affect their homework performance, which in turn would influence their school learning and achievement. Surprisingly little research has been reported concerning students' attitudes toward homework, and specifically variables that affect students' attitudes toward homework (see, e.g., Chen & Stevenson, 1989; Rickards, 1982). One purpose of this study was thus to determine if Caucasian- and Chinese-American children's attitudes toward schoolwork would be related to their gender, SES, age, school achievement, and school attainment value, that is, children's feelings about the

importance of doing well in school (see, e.g., Mussen, Conger, Kagan, & Huston, 1990).

Additionally, the relationship between students' perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork and the five predictor variables noted above was examined for both Caucasian- and Chinese-American children. Children's perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork was examined for two reasons. First, although parental behaviors have been shown to be related to children's school achievement, children's perceptions of these behaviors are largely unexplored, even though theorists (e.g., Blyth, 1982; Bronfenbrenner, 1977) suggested that children's phenomenal view of their socializing environment is of considerable importance (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). Second, it is parental behaviors as perceived by children that help determine exactly what it is that children adopt and internalize as their own to guide their behaviors, thus becoming their own socialization agents (cf. Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1979). The emphasis here is on children's perception of parental behaviors and their underlying values that they might adopt and internalize to help shape their attitudes toward schoolwork.

School attainment value was used as a predictor variable in this study because one might expect that one's values affect one's attitudes and behaviors (cf. Santrock, 1993) and would be related to one's child-rearing experiences at home. Similarly, one might expect that

students' attitudes toward schoolwork would be related to their academic achievement, which, in turn, would be related to parental encouragement and support. Gender was used as a predictor variable because research (e.g., Mussen, Conger, Kagan, & Huston, 1990) showed that throughout the school years, particularly in the elementary and high school years, girls tend to outperform boys academically. It would therefore be of interest to determine if girls have more positive attitudes toward schoolwork and more positive perceptions of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. Age was used as a predictor variable because prior research indicated that as students became older, their attitudes toward school and learning became less positive (Buxton, 1973; Chen & Stevenson, 1989). SES was used as a predictor variable because it was noted (see, e.g., Slavin, 1991) that children of higher SES tend to achieve higher in school and receive greater parental support for school achievement than students of lower SES. Because of these considerations, it was hypothesized that gender, age, SES, school attainment value, and academic achievement of Caucasian- and Chinese-American students would be related to their attitudes toward schoolwork and to their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork.

Little research has been reported concerning the relationship between students' attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. Given that parents are children's primary agents

of socialization (e.g., Hetherington & Parke, 1986) and that attitudes tend to influence behaviors (Cooper & Croyle, 1984), it would be of importance to determine if a relationship exists between children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. Accordingly, a second purpose of this study was to ascertain this relationship and it was hypothesized that such a relationship would exist for both Caucasian- and Chinese-American children.

Chinese-American children were chosen for study because no research has been reported on their attitudes toward schoolwork or their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. It would thus be of interest to compare them with Caucasian-American children to determine if differences exist on these measures.

Method

Subjects. The participants were 140 Caucasian-American and 97 Chinese-American students attending the 4th- through 8th-grade classes in two Roman Catholic schools. The students in the first school were almost entirely Caucasian-American while those in the other were mostly Chinese-American from a major city in California. Only students who indicated their ethnic origin to be Chinese or Caucasian were included in the data analyses. These 237 students were part of a total of 433 Roman Catholic elementary school students from Canada and the U.S. who took part in a larger study on students' attitudes toward schoolwork. The reason

why 4th- through 8th-grade students were chosen for study is that they had been in school for some time and were old enough to understand and respond to the tasks required of them. Roman Catholic school students were recruited for the study because they are a neglected population in research.

Materials. A questionnaire was used in this study. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-type items (e.g., My parents are interested in what I am learning in school; I like doing homework) measuring students' perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork and students' attitudes toward schoolwork. The questionnaire also included demographic questions asking the participants to indicate their gender, grade level in school, birthday, and the highest level of schooling completed by their fathers and mothers (or guardians). The average of the reported father's and mothers's education was used to measure students' SES (cf. Bjorklund & Weiss, 1985). The participants were also asked to indicate how important it was for them to do well in school using a scale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important) and also how well they were doing in school using a scale from 1 (very poorly) to 7 (very well). These last two questions were used to measure students' school attainment value and academic achievement (see, e.g., Ames & Archer, 1988), respectively.

Procedure. The study was conducted in the participants' classrooms. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously. They were told that there were no

right or wrong answers and the best answer was the one that honestly and accurately reflected how they felt. (All statements were read to the 4th-graders since they were younger and might have difficulty comprehending the statements if left to themselves).

Results

The data from all 433 participants were first analyzed using factor analysis. Seven scales with acceptable reliability emerged (Cronbach's alphas ranged from .69 to .94 for the present sample of 237). These seven scales were subsequently used as dependent variables. Four of these seven scales were concerned with perceived parental behaviors that support schoolwork and the remaining three with students' attitudes toward schoolwork. The number of items for each scale ranged from five to 12. These seven scales and their intercorrelations are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

As can be seen from Table 1, the correlations among these scales range from a low of .01 to a high of .72, with the great majority of them in the relatively low range. These findings thus suggest that these scales are relatively independent measures in and of themselves.

With regard to the intercorrelations among the predictor variables (school attainment value, achievement, gender, age, and SES), school attainment value was found to

correlate moderately with academic achievement (r's = .57 and .44, p's < .001, for Caucasian- and Chinese-Americans, respectively). The other correlations among these predictors, as might be expected, were very small, ranging from -.01 to .24, and hence will not be discussed further.

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were subsequently performed for the two ethnic groups separately using the seven scales noted above as dependent measures and the five variables noted above as predictors. The results are shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

With regard to children's attitudes toward schoolwork, Table 2 shows that, for Caucasian-Americans, school attainment value correlated positively with "homework is important and useful" and with a "sense of responsibility for homework and learning." Achievement correlated positively with "liking homework and school," and age correlated negatively with a "sense of responsibility for homework and learning." For Chinese-Americans, school attainment value and achievement correlated positively with all three measures of students' attitudes toward schoolwork (homework is important and useful, sense of responsibility for homework and learning, and liking homework and school). Age was found to correlate negatively with "homework is important and useful" and with "liking homework and school."

In regard to perceived parental behaviors that support schoolwork, Table 2 shows that, for Caucasian-Americans, school attainment value correlated positively with three of the four measures (parental valuing of schoolwork, parental feeling about unacceptable school behaviors, and parental feeling about good school performance); gender correlated negatively with one measure (perceived parental valuing of schoolwork). For Chinese-Americans, age correlated negatively with perceived "parental concern for schoolwork" and academic achievement correlated positively with perceived "parental feeling about good school performance."

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were also performed for the two ethnic groups separately using the three scales measuring students' attitudes toward schoolwork as dependent variables and the four scales measuring students' perceived parental behaviors that support schoolwork as predictors. The results are shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

As can be seen from Table 3, for Caucasian-Americans, "homework is important and useful" correlated positively with perceived "parental valuing of schoolwork;" "liking homework and school" correlated positively with perceived "parental concern for schoolwork;" and the "sense of responsibility for homework and learning" correlated positively with perceived "parental valuing of schoolwork"

and "parental feeling about good school performance." For Chinese-Americans, on the other hand, each of the three measures of students' attitudes toward schoolwork correlated positively with perceived "parental feeling about good school performance" and "parental valuing of schoolwork."

A one-way MANOVA was also conducted to determine if the two groups of students differed on the seven scales and a significant difference was found, $F(7, 229)=12.14$, $p < .001$. Subsequent univariate analysis showed that the two groups differed significantly on three measures. Specifically, Chinese-Americans perceived less "parental concern for schoolwork" and less "parental feeling about good school performance," but they "liked homework and school" more than Caucasian-Americans, $Fs(1, 235)=26.75, 14.63, 19.95$, respectively, $ps < .001$ in all cases (The Ms for the three measures were 3.85 vs. 4.24; 4.44 vs. 4.70; 2.86 vs. 2.29; and the SDs were .58 vs. .56; .62 vs. .41; .98 vs. .97, respectively, for the two groups).

Discussion

The data in Table 2 suggest that to promote school attainment value in Caucasian-American children, parents need to show their children that they value schoolwork, feel negatively about unacceptable school behaviors and feel positively about good school performance. This encouragement of school attainment value may be expected to help promote children's positive attitudes toward schoolwork. For Chinese-American students, it appears that three educational

implications may be derived. First, parents need to continue to show concern about their children's schoolwork as they move on to higher grades in school. Second, they need to express positive feelings about good school performance to their children to help promote academic achievement. Third, parents need to encourage the development of school attainment value in their children and help them experience success in schoolwork in their effort to promote children's positive attitudes toward schoolwork.

As shown in Table 2, American girls, compared to boys, were found to perceive their parents to value schoolwork less. This finding seems to agree with that of Block (1984), who showed that both mothers and fathers tended to emphasize achievement and competition more for their sons than daughters. Conceivably, differential parental pressure on achievement such as that shown by Block (1984) predisposes girls to perceive their parents as valuing schoowork less than boys. Research is needed to further examine this issue.

As shown in Table 2, age was found to correlate negatively with a "sense of responsibility for homework and learning" for Caucasian-Americans and negatively with "homework is important and useful" and with "liking homework and school" for Chinese-Americans. This finding agrees with those of Buxton (1973) and Chen and Stevenson (1989). These researchers found that as students became older, their attitudes toward school and homework became poorer. The exact reasons for this negative relationship between age and

attitudes toward schoolwork are not clear. In the case of Chinese-American children, one might speculate that this negative relationship may be due to the perceived decreasing parental concern for their schoolwork as they became older. Further research is needed to examine this conjecture.

The finding that achievement correlates positively with "liking homework and school" for both Caucasian- and Chinese-American students may be expected because homework and school presents an opportunity for students to perform well, and performing well is self-reinforcing. Students who perform well thus may be expected to like homework and school while those performing poorly may be expected to dislike homework and school. The implication of this finding is that it is important to give students a feeling of success to promote positive attitudes toward schoolwork.

The data in Table 2 also suggest that for predicting children's attitudes toward schoolwork, academic achievement was more useful for Chinese- than Caucasian-Americans. This is the case because academic achievement was found to predict all three measures of students' attitudes toward schoolwork for Chinese-Americans but only one for Caucasian-Americans. For predicting perceived parental behaviors that support schoolwork, however, the data in Table 2 suggest that school attainment value was useful for Caucasian- but not Chinese-Americans. This is the case because school attainment value was found to predict three of the four measures of perceived parental behaviors that support

schoolwork for Caucasian-Americans but none for Chinese-Americans. This sharp contrast may reflect a general awareness among Chinese-American children of a pervasive cultural emphasis on the value of educational attainment in the Chinese culture, which is well documented (see, e.g., Chen & Uttal, 1988).

With regard to the relationship between children's attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork, the data in Table 3 show that, in general, parental behaviors that support schoolwork are important for children's attitudes toward schoolwork for both groups of children. For Caucasian-Americans, however, it appears that different parental behaviors that support schoolwork are important for different aspects of attitudes toward schoolwork. Thus, perceived "parental valuing of schoolwork" appears important for students' feeling that "homework is important and useful" and perceived "parental concern for schoolwork" appears important for students' "liking homework and school." For Chinese-Americans, on the other hand, the data in Table 3 suggest that the same parental behaviors that support schoolwork are important for different aspects of attitudes toward schoolwork. Thus, the same two measures of perceived parental behaviors that support schoolwork, namely, perceived "parental feeling about good school performance" and "parental valuing of schoolwork," are important for "liking homework and school,"

"sense of responsibility for homework and learning," and the feeling that "homework is important and useful."

One difference of specific interest between the two groups of students is in predicting "liking homework and school." As can be seen from Table 3, "parental concern for schoolwork" is a significant predictor for Caucasian-Americans, but "parental feeling about good school performance" and "parental valuing of schoolwork" are significant predictors for Chinese-Americans. This finding suggests that, to help students develop a liking for homework and school, the behavioral aspect of parental support for schoolwork such as showing concern appears important for Caucasian-Americans whereas the affective aspects of parental support for schoolwork such as feeling and valuing appear important for Chinese-Americans. Moreover, as can be seen from Table 3, perceived "parental feeling about good school performance" is a significant predictor for all three measures of attitudes toward schoolwork for Chinese-Americans but it is a significant predictor for only one measure for Caucasian-Americans. These findings seem to have two implications. First, "parental feeling about good school performance" is a more useful predictor for attitudes toward schoolwork for Chinese- than Caucasian-Americans. Second, it is important for Chinese-American parents to show positive feelings about good school performance to their children in their effort to promote positive attitudes toward schoolwork. This latter

idea seems especially important as Chinese-American parents often regard withholding praise as a means of teaching a child humility (Jensen, 1985). Parental withholding of praise may also help explain the finding noted earlier that Chinese-American children perceived less "parental feeling about good school performance" than their Caucasian peers.

As noted previously, Chinese-American students perceived less "parental concern for schoolwork" than their Caucasian peers. Given the Chinese cultural emphasis on educational achievement and family discipline (e.g., Lin & Fu, 1990; Chen & Uttal, 1988), this finding is unexpected and may reflect the mediating role of parental belief in Catholic education. Since parents normally pay tuition fees to send their children to Catholic schools, Caucasian parents who send their children to Catholic schools may have a more heightened concern for their children's schoolwork than Chinese-American parents, and this may be reflected in their children's perception. Perhaps further research is needed to address this issue.

That Chinese-American students were found to like homework and school more than Caucasian-Americans is consistent with the finding of Chen and Stevenson (1989), who found Chinese students have more positive attitudes toward homework than their American peers. What seems interesting, however, is the fact that this finding was obtained despite Chinese-American children reported perceiving less "parental concern for schoolwork" and less

"parental feeling about good school performance." Further research is needed to ascertain the exact underlying causes for this difference in "liking homework and school" between Caucasian- and Chinese-American students.

In conclusion, the present study shows that the cultural background of students mediates the prediction of their attitudes toward schoolwork and their perception of parental behaviors that support schoolwork. This suggests that for promoting positive attitudes toward schoolwork, different parental socialization practices appear important for children of different cultural background. Moreover, since the present study focused on parental behaviors as perceived by students rather than as reported by parents, a second conclusion is that it is important for parents to make sure that their children are aware of their values, feelings, and concern for schoolwork in their effort to promote children's attitudes toward schoolwork.

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Table 1

Intercorrelations Among Seven Measures

Caucasian-Americans (n=140)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	---	.45***	-.15*	.25**	.26***	.28***	.30***
2		---	-.05	.10	.59***	.25***	.49***
3			---	-.45***	-.08	.01	-.13
4				---	.17*	.11	.28***
5					---	.51***	.65***
6						---	.44***
7							---

Chinese-Americans (n=97)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	---	.46***	-.14	.28**	.25**	.27**	.19*
2		---	-.28**	.20*	.27**	.28**	.32***
3			---	-.65***	-.20*	-.26**	-.23*
4				---	.29**	.34***	.27**
5					---	.62***	.72***
6						---	.57***
7							---

Note.
1. Perceived parental concern for schoolwork (e.g., My parents are interested in what I am learning at school).
2. Perceived parental valuing of schoolwork (e.g., My parents feel school is important for me).
3. Perceived parental feeling about unacceptable school behaviors (e.g., My parents feel bad if I misbehave in school).
4. Perceived parental feeling about good school performance (e.g., My parents feel good if I work very hard in school).
5. Homework is important and useful (e.g., Homework helps me to learn).
6. Liking homework and school (e.g., I like doing homework).
7. Sense of responsibility for homework and learning (e.g., It is my job to finish my homework).

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 2

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Students' Responses to Seven Scales

Scale	Predictors: Caucasian Americans (R/Beta)	Predictors: Chinese Americans (R/Beta)
Students' Attitudes		
Homework is important and useful	S.A.Value (.45***/.45)	S.A.Value(.63***/.63) Achieve. (.69***/.33) Age (.74***/-.26)
Liking homework & school	Achieve. (.27**/.27)	Achieve. (.44***/.44) Age (.50***/-.23) S.A.Value(.54***/.22)
Sense of responsibility for homework & learning	S.A.Value (.47***/.47) Age (.50***/-.16)	S.A.Value(.65***/.65) Achieve. (.70***/.29)
Perceived Parental Behaviors		
Parental concern for schoolwork	-----	Age (.29**/-.29)
Parental valuing of schoolwork	S.A.Value (.24**/.24) Gender (.31**/-.19)	-----
Parental feeling about unacceptable school behaviors	S.A.Value (.29***/-.29)	-----
Parental feeling about good school performance	S.A.Value (.43***/.43)	Achieve. (.27*/.27)

Note:
S.A.Value=School Attainment Value.
Achieve.=Self-Perceived Academic Achievement.
Sex coded: 1=Male, 2=Female.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 3

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Students' Responses to Three Scales

	Predictors	
Scale	Caucasian Americans (R/Beta)	Chinese Americans (R/Beta)
Homework is important and useful	Parental valuing of schoolwork (.59***/.59)	Parental feeling about good school performance (.29**/.29) Parental valuing of schoolwork (.37***/.22)
Liking homework & school	Parental concern for schoolwork (.28***/.28)	Parental feeling about good school performance (.34***/.34) Parental valuing of schoolwork (.40***/.22)
Sense of responsibility for homework & learning	Parental valuing of schoolwork (.49***/.49) Parental feeling about good school performance (.54***/.23)	Parental valuing of schoolwork (.32***/.32) Parental feeling about good school performance (.38***/.21)

Note:
**p < .01. ***p < .001.